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ABSTRACT

Selected questions from a questionnaire that helps students evaluate how their course deals with women are presented. Some changes were made to this questionnaire, which was initially developed and used at Duke University (North Carolina). The survey also includes selected questions about classroom interaction. It can be used as is by individual students or faculty members to heighten awareness of women in the curriculum and/or to evaluate courses. It can be used in part; or it can be adapted for use by faculty, departments, or institutions with the results tallied for further evaluation. Selected survey multiple-choice questions cover: evaluation of course readings, evaluation of the syllabus, evaluation of the class, and overall course evaluation. Five essay questions are also included. Questions that can provide a frame of reference for further thinking are offered, since assumptions about gender may be explicit or implicit in many texts and topics assigned in the classroom. Five resources that provide historical accounts of new scholarship on women are identified, along with three basic bibliographic sources, and 12 selected overviews. (SW)

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PROJECT ON THE STATUS AND EDUCATION OF WOMEN

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Evaluating Courses for Inclusion of New Scholarship on Women*

ENGLISH: "The Outsiders in American Literature" should be retitled "The Male Outsiders in American Literature." This course encompasses only the novels written by male authors about male outsiders, eliminating and ignoring the existence of female counterparts. . . . Any female student aspiring to become a writer will be intimidated by the dominance of male writers as misrepresented in this course.

RELIGION: This course leads the student to the assumption that religious mystical experiences are restricted to men. No evidence was given for the equality of female experience, and when left to draw one's own conclusions, the student would most likely assume that there have been no significant female mystics.

HISTORY: . . .[L]ooking back on it now, I find it hard to believe that all the women did was cook and clean and mind the children. What about the families where the men did not return from battle? What about all the women who did not have husbands and were running their own businesses and organizations? The men simply could not have done everything there was to do.

PSYCHOLOGY: Almost all of the pictures are of males until the neuroses section.

POLITICAL SCIENCE: A closer look at the subject matter . . . reveals that it may be titled "The Male Political System," for the role of women in the development of our nation seems almost nonexistent. . . . In addition, because the text and articles were all written by men, the student is implicitly taught that women were either unconcerned with or incapable of discussing the direction of American government.

—responses from questionnaire given at Duke University

WHY A QUESTIONNAIRE?

Faculty want to be fair not only in their teaching but also in the way in which they present information to their students. Yet many faculty are unaware of how their courses may be biased.

Here is a description of the coverage of women in traditional courses from the report of a large curriculum integration project at Towson State University: In the last two decades, educators have begun to recognize that the experiences and perspectives of women are almost totally absent from the traditional curriculum. Surveys in the 1970s revealed, for example, that history textbooks devoted less than 1 percent of their coverage to women; that the most widely used textbook in art history did not include a single woman artist; and that literature courses contained, on average, only 8 percent women authors. Such discoveries have led many people to question the validity of the version of human experience offered by the liberal arts.

Thus, in the 1970s, women's studies developed as a new area of scholarly inquiry. Today there are more than three thousand courses and six hundred degree-granting programs in women's studies. Despite this explosion of new knowledge, however, much of the basic liberal arts curriculum has remained relatively untouched by women's studies. Women's studies courses remain separate from the basic liberal arts curriculum, with the result that the majority of students attending college in the United States remain unexposed to and even unaware of scholarship on women.[1]

Fortunately, faculty and administrators are becoming increasingly aware that to educate effectively everybody about new scholarship on women, women's studies courses alone are not sufficient. Many educators are beginning to incorporate this new body of knowledge into their general liberal arts curriculum.

This paper presents a student questionnaire—with some changes—that was initially developed and used at Duke University.[2] The original purpose of the questionnaire was to help students evaluate the courses they had taken in terms of information presented about women, as well as to help increase their awareness of new scholarship on women in general.

Jean O'Barr, director of the Women's Studies Program at Duke, notes that students in the introductory women's studies course who had become aware of these issues regarding women in the curriculum expressed acute concerns over the exclusion of women in their other courses. She states, "Many acknowledge having felt unaware of the way women were presented in previous courses or even the absence of women altogether and therefore [were] satisfied with a course until they returned to it and examined it for gender balance."[3]

HOW TO USE THIS QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire will be helpful in asking the essential question: How does this course deal with women? The survey also includes selected questions about classroom interaction. It can be used as is by individual students or faculty members to heighten awareness of women in the curriculum and/or to evaluate courses; it can be used in part; or it can be adapted for use by faculty, departments, or institutions with the results tallied for further evaluation.

*This paper is based on a questionnaire initially developed by the Women's Studies Program at Duke University, directed by Jean O'Barr.

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SELECTED QUESTIONS

Evaluation of Course Readings

To answer questions 1 through 9, randomly select five sections (such as chapters) from the assigned readings and examine a page or two from each section.

Use the following scale for question 1:
a. never; b. sometimes; c. about half; d. usually; e. always; f. not applicable

1. Examine the readings and answer the following.
_____ How often were the pronouns "she" or "her" used?
_____ How often were the role titles male-related (e.g., "chairman")?
_____ How often were females depicted in high-prestige jobs or roles?
_____ How often did the examples relate only to typical male experiences or men doing things?

2. If there are photos and illustrations:
_____ How many pictures with people are there? (If none, enter an "X" and go to question 3.)
_____ How many of them are male?
_____ How many of them are female?
_____ How many of them have both males and females together?
_____ How many show men in positions of power or action (e.g., male doctor or male athlete)?
_____ How many show women in positions of power or action (e.g., female business leader, female athlete, or females taking charge)?
_____ How many show women in traditional roles or sedentary (e.g., female secretaries or seated female)?
_____ How many show men in familial roles (e.g., doing housework or taking care of children)?

Please use the following scale for question 3:
a. excellent; b. fair; c. poor

3. Based on your responses to questions 1 and 2:
_____ Rate the readings for nonsexist language.
_____ Rate the photos and illustrations in terms of representation of both sexes.

4. If the reading assignments are from a textbook, use either its index, footnotes, or endnotes to determine the number of women and men in the cited references.
_____ How many female authors/co-authors were cited?
_____ How many male authors/co-authors were cited?
_____ How many could not be determined? (No first name given or first name does not clearly indicate the sex of the author.)
_____ Are women listed as a subject in the index?
_____ How many pages are devoted to individual women and to women as subject matter?
_____ How many pages are devoted to individual men and to men as subject matter?

5. If the reading assignments are from a variety of sources, determine:
_____ How many authors/co-authors were female?
_____ How many authors/co-authors were male?
_____ How many could not be determined? (No first name given or first name does not clearly indicate the sex of the author.)

6. Examine the chapter headings or article titles.
_____ How many chapters or articles are there? (If there are several books, look at all the chapter headings.)
_____ How many chapters are separately devoted to issues concerning women? Please describe.

For questions 7 and 8, use the following scale:
a. strongly disagree; b. disagree; c. not sure; d. agree; e. strongly agree

7. If there is at least one or more chapter or article entirely devoted to issues that relate to women, how would you describe the portrayal?
_____ The only women depicted were treated as exceptional women.
_____ Women as a group were seen as problems or anomalies.
_____ Women and men were treated separately and not compared.
_____ Women and men were described both separately and comparatively, so that interrelationships were stressed.

8. If there were no chapters or articles separately devoted to women, would you say that:
_____ Women are incorporated throughout the materials.
_____ The readings are womenless.
_____ A gender component could not have been included in the readings of this course. Please explain.

Please answer "yes" or "no" to question 9.

9. In this course, did the reading assignments include materials covering:
_____ Traditional roles of women in one or more societies?
_____ Contributions of outstanding women?
_____ Descriptions by women of their own lives?
_____ Ways women's lives relate to the social, economic, and political systems of a given society?
_____ Differences between the positions, power, and/or perspectives of men and women?
_____ Differences between minority and majority women?
_____ Differences among women of different minority groups?

Evaluation of the Syllabus

10. Examine the course syllabus and determine the following:
_____ Were women integrated throughout the syllabus? (If "no," go to question 11.)
_____ Into how many sections is the syllabus divided?
_____ How many of these sections discuss topics *related* to women, such as reproductive rights?
_____ How many separate sections are *devoted* solely to women, such as "women portrayed in 19th century writings"? (If none are, go to question 11.)
_____ Was the time allotted for sections concerning women basically equal to the time allotted for other sections? ("yes" or "no")

_____ Do the sections concerning women fit into the logical order of the course (e.g., not tacked on at the end of the syllabus)? ("yes" or "no")
_____ Was the time allotted for gender-related topics actually used (i.e., did the course actually cover the gender section)?[4] ("yes" or "no")

Please comment on question 10.

Evaluation of the Class

11. Approximately how many people were in the class?
_____ How many women? _____ How many men?

12. If films were shown in class, answer the following. If none were, go to question 13.
_____ How many of the films incorporated aspects of women's lives?
_____ In how many was the main focus of the films on male characters and male experiences?
_____ In how many were the women portrayed in traditional roles?
_____ How many of the films expanded your knowledge about women?

Please answer "yes" or "no" to the following.
13. Were any of the following topics included in class lectures or discussions:
_____ Contributions of outstanding women?
_____ Descriptions by women of their own lives?
_____ Traditional roles of women in various societies?
_____ The way women's lives relate to the social, economic, and political systems of a given society?
_____ Differences between the positions, power, and/or perspectives of women and men?
_____ Differences between minority and majority women?
_____ Differences among women of different minority groups?

Please comment on question 13.

_____ 14. If the class format allowed comments and questions, did men and women comment and/or ask questions equally? (Please answer "yes," "no," or "NA" [not applicable])
_____ If no, did more men or women comment and/or ask questions? (a. men; b. women)

Use the following scale for questions 15 to 20:
a. never; b. sometimes; c. frequently; d. always; e. not sure; if not applicable, please use "NA"
_____ 15. When men were speaking, how common was it for them to be interrupted?
_____ 16. When women were speaking, how common was it for them to be interrupted?
_____ 17. How often were classroom topics difficult for male students to relate to because the topics involved areas in which men were not experienced?
_____ 18. How often were classroom topics difficult for female students to relate to because the topics involved areas in which women were not experienced?
_____ 19. If papers were a class requirement, were there opportunities to do women-related and/or gender-related research papers?
_____ 20. Did you ever feel hesitant about using an example relating to women and/or women's issues in class participation or on a test? Please comment.
_____ 21. When issues or materials involving women were presented by faculty, did the faculty member treat the subject as seriously as other subjects were treated?
_____ 22. When students raised issues or concerns relating to women, did the faculty member treat the subject as seriously as other subjects were treated?

Overall Course Evaluation

Having looked at various components of your course, now look at your course as a whole.
_____ 23. How would you classify this course?
a. womenless—no mention of women at all
b. the only women depicted were treated as exceptional women
c. women as a group were seen as problems or anomalies
d. women and men were treated separately and not compared
e. women and men were described both separately and comparatively, stressing interrelationships.[5]

Please comment on question 23.

Use the following scale to answer questions 24 to 28:
a. strongly disagree; b. disagree; c. not sure; d. agree; e. strongly agree
_____ 24. I did not learn anything about how women feel about their lives from this course.
_____ 25. My understanding of the ways women's lives relate to the social, economic, and political systems of their society did not increase as a result of this course.
_____ 26. I feel that this course added to my understanding of the relationship between the roles of men and women.
_____ 27. My knowledge of the significance of women's contributions to society increased as a result of this course.
_____ 28. I did not learn very much about women's traditional roles in society in this course.

Essay Questions (Please use a separate sheet of paper for the remaining questions.)
☐ How was the role of women presented?
☐ How did it differ from the way the role of men was presented?
☐ What did you learn about women in this subject?
☐ Based on what you learned in this course, what assumptions can you make about the role and status of women in society?
☐ What are the strengths and weaknesses of the course in terms of providing a full perspective of its subject matter? If there is gender bias, what is required to balance the perspective?

ISSUES TO THINK ABOUT

Assumptions about gender may be explicit or implicit in many of the texts and topics assigned in the classroom. Learning to ask questions about these assumptions and their implications requires commitment to a way of thinking that continually generates new questions. The following questions can provide a frame of reference for further thinking:

- Is the knowledge that we acquire equally descriptive of the history, culture, expectations, and experiences of women and men?
- If the body of knowledge we acquire has been developed and practiced primarily by men, do women students have as much of an opportunity as male students to approach it appreciatively and critically?
- Has the historical exclusion of women from education and the professions shaped the research, theory, writings, and questions presented in our disciplines? To what extent have biological, psychological, sociological theories, as well as political, literary, and art analysis assumed that male experience is the norm?
- Do you think that male and female students bring different skills, attitudes, and perspectives to the classroom?
- Have the materials and ideas presented in various academic disciplines been sources of justification for excluding women from participation in the public world by claims that there are inherent biological and temperamental limitations in women? Have the disciplines contributed to arguments that women are uniquely and solely suited for nurturing children and adults both in the home and in caretaking institutions?

NOTES

1. The ideas from this and the preceding paragraph are taken from the introduction of *Resources for Curriculum Change*, ed. Sara Coulter, K. Edgington, and Elaine Hedges (Towson, MD: Towson State University, 1986), pp. 1–2.
2. Suzanne Onorato, a graduate student in sociology at Duke University, assisted in the development of the questionnaire. The questionnaire also drew on the work of many other women's studies programs, in particular assessment materials compiled by Betty Schnitz, Northwest Center for Research on Women, University of Washington.
3. Telephone conversation with Jean O'Barr, 12 April 1988.
4. One of the questions in women's studies is whether the subject matter is *women* or *gender*. When we study *women*, we study a group defined by sex and social experience. When we study *gender*, we study the economic, political, social, and psychological architecture of masculinity and femininity and their interrelationship, and the social structure that supports that architecture.
5. Peggy McIntosh of the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women developed these categories to describe stages of development concerning the integration of scholarship on women into the curriculum.

SELECTED RESOURCES

Historical Accounts of New Scholarship

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